



Senator Val Stevens

JULY 2003

39th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



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Government Operations
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Dear Friends and Neighbors,

During this budget year, we've had to make some tough decisions about our state's priorities when it comes to taxing, spending, and cutting or expanding programs. We've worked hard to make sure we protect our most vulnerable citizens and help the economy. I think we've done that, and in the following newsletter I'll go over some of the highlights of this legislative session.

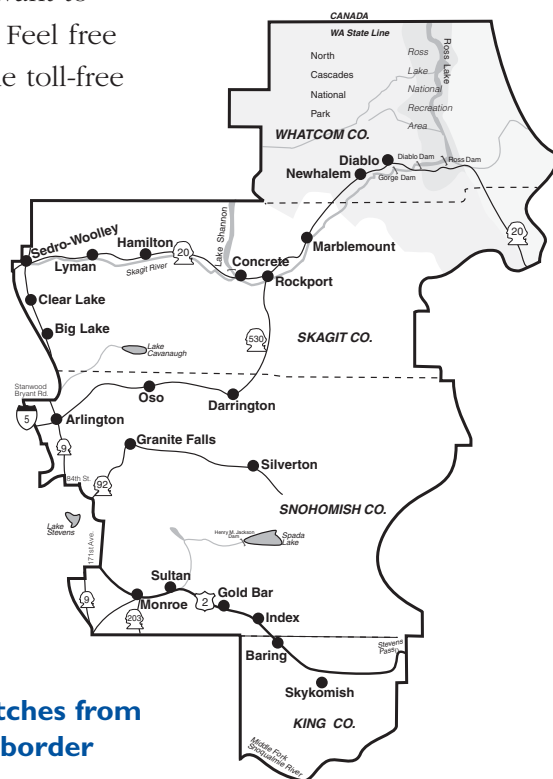
In addition, this newsletter will cover some transportation issues, including the new and current transportation budgets and other key bills that passed the Legislature. These bills protect families, reduce state government and save lives.

More than anything, we want to create solid programs that will help you. After all, the citizens of Washington are the reason we come to Olympia each year. We know you are concerned about jobs, the economy, health care, your children's education and the future of your families. As an elected official, I want to make sure these concerns are addressed and that your best interest is served. We're working hard in the Senate to help boost the economy and attract new businesses to our state. In addition, I'm doing my best to do no harm and to do the right thing.

As your senator, I represent you and want to hear your comments and suggestions. Feel free to contact my office in Olympia via the toll-free legislative hotline at 1-800-562-6000.

Sincerely,

Val Stevens
39th District Senator



**The 39th Legislative District stretches from
King County to the Canadian border**

Balancing a budget without taxes

RIGHT AFTER the elections last year when the Senate Republicans knew we had control of the Senate, we met together to outline our goals for this session. Our number one goal was to balance the state budget without any new taxes.

Our neighbors, friends and families are all struggling in a sluggish economy. Everyone knows of at least one person who has lost his or her job. Now is not the time to slap a tax increase on taxpayers.

I'm proud to announce we did exactly what we set out to do at the beginning of session—no new taxes. The Legislature passed a balanced budget that protects the most vulnerable citizens, and we did it without asking for more money.

Several budget proposals cut funding to state human services, such as services to the developmentally disabled and troubled youth. We stuck to our principles that these vulnerable citizens need protecting, and we won.

In addition, we were able to provide funding for our schools. Teachers who have been teaching for seven years or less will receive a pay raise. With this budget, beginning teachers will make at least \$30,000 a year. Class size funding was also restored to the budget, allowing children to receive the best education possible.

Finally, there has been much discussion about the home health care workers. These dedicated individuals provide an invaluable service in our community. Because of various issues with the negotiated contract, the Legislature ultimately rejected it. However, it was important to provide a pay raise to homecare workers. The Legislature will provide a 75-cent pay increase for all union and non-union home care workers in the state.

Traveling from here to there

SINCE 1991, the gas tax has not changed from its current 23 cents. Back in 1990, the gas tax increased 4 cents and an additional cent was added the following year. I personally believe that this tax is adequate to meet our needs if it is managed responsibly.

As an elected official, I've worked to reduce the size and scope of state government. One of the glaring problem areas is the state's Department of Transportation. This agency's inefficiencies have not been adequately addressed, and we have seen an increase in public transportation spending with few results.

This year the Legislature approved a 5-cent gas tax increase. I believe that increasing the gas tax by 5 cents is not acceptable in the current economic downturn, forcing me to vote no.

We don't need to raise taxes and burden families who are already struggling in this recession. Government leadership is about making tough choices. All we really need is to carefully choose the transportation projects that will benefit families in areas where the most growth has occurred—not by raising taxes.

The tax increases and construction projects have been discussed as a 10-year transportation package. True, all of the construction projects should be completed in 10 years, but we will pay the gas tax for 30 years until the construction bonds have been paid off.

The 30-year gas package generates \$4.1 billion by using:

- A one-time 5-cent increase in the state's gas tax
- A 15 percent gross-weight fee increase for commercial trucks
- A 0.3 percent sales tax on motor vehicles



Senator Val Stevens discussing upcoming bills with Senate staff

Three of my family protection bills signed into law

ESB 5379—Dependency petition hearings

DEPENDENCY HEARINGS determine if allegations of abandonment, abuse or neglect are true. This measure would open the hearing to the public, unless the judge decided it wasn't in the best interest of the child or if either parent requests the hearing to be closed. An open hearing would allow full disclosure and make the system more reliable.

If we were to keep dependency hearings closed to the public, we create a wall of secrecy that prevents the public from understanding child abuse and how the state handles the situation. This bill opens the process, which will support actions needed to keep children safe from harm and support changes required to keep the family together.

ESSB 5779—Sibling relationships

WASHINGTON HAS NO legal requirement for the courts to place a child into a foster home with a brother or sister who has already been removed from the home. Child Protective Services will sometimes split children up when they are removed from the home. In addition, a child may be removed from the home after another child has already been taken and then placed with a different family, instead of with the brother or sister who now lives outside of the home.

I believe a child is benefited from a healthy family relationship. In addition, children benefit from maintaining relationships with brothers and sisters whenever possible. Being removed from the home is a traumatic experience, and so is being taken away from brothers and sisters.

With the passage of ESSB 5779, the courts now must address the relationships between brothers and sisters when they determine the placement of a child. Options include placing the children together, ensuring visitation rights, etc.

SB 5410—Sex offenders

SEX OFFENDERS IN Washington must register with the county where they reside. The state ranks the sex offender as a level 1, 2 or 3, where level 3 is the worst and most dangerous, and level 1 is the least likely to reoffend. Only level 3 sex offender information can be posted to a Web site, which can include a name, photo, physical description, address and relevant criminal convictions. The Web helps inform people of a potential risk. The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs has also created a statewide Internet database of level 3 sex offenders. Under this bill, the state will help fund the maintenance costs of the Web site and can now post level 2 sex offender information to the Web. This step is vital in protecting our families and communities from potential harm.

The Web site should be available in the first part of August. It is:

www.ml.waspc.org

Saving lives and reducing government waste

SB 5284—Vehicle traction devices save lives

EVERY YEAR people die because they lack the proper traction devices to go over Washington's mountain passes. According to a Washington Traffic Safety Commission report, almost 5,270 people died from car accidents in snowy or icy road conditions from 1993-2000.

This bill is designed to save peoples' lives.

Mountain storms often come upon Washington's mountain passes quickly and without warning. If we can deter motorists from traveling without proper traction equipment, we could prevent damage and injury to themselves and their property, as well as damage and injury to others. It is my hope that the bill will attract attention and begin to save lives.

Under this bill, a person could be fined \$500 if the person fails to use required traction equipment.

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ESB 5991—Reducing government waste

SINCE THE ESTABLISHMENT of a secure community transition facility (sex offender facility or SCTF) on McNeil Island, the state has been required to have a staff ratio of one staff member to each resident during waking hours and one staff for every two residents during sleeping hours when the facility has six or fewer residents. In addition, the facility had to have a police officer on the island 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

We have yet to have any problems at the facility, and we haven't needed the police officer. However, the requirements were set in statute, so I sponsored the bill to update the ratios to save the state money, while continuing to protect the public.

Now the ratios will be one staff member to three residents during waking hours and one staff member to four residents during sleeping hours, with a minimum of two staff per facility. We've also repealed the requirement for the police officer to

be present around the clock. Instead, an emergency response team for McNeil Island will plan, coordinate and respond in the event of an escape from the facility. This does not apply to any other secure community transition facility in the state. McNeil Island is unique.

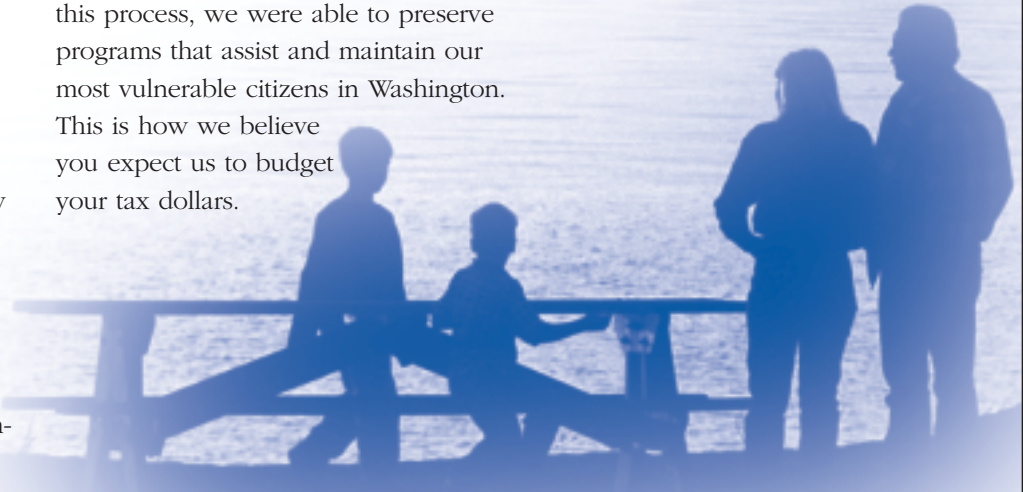
For this budget cycle, we were able to save \$2 million, which was applied to other needed human services. By reducing government waste, we can continue to provide needed services without raising taxes.

Protecting families

AS CHAIR OF the Senate Children and Family Services and Corrections Committee, I started the legislative session with a theme—to preserve the integrity of the family and to keep family members safe. We wanted to accomplish this theme by not allowing the Senate Ways and Means Committee to write policy through the state budget funding.

As a committee, we worked together with the Ways and Means Committee to go through the budget looking for ways to maintain our theme while still cutting nonessen-

tial government services. We gave each program our most reasonable and deliberate review. By going through this process, we were able to preserve programs that assist and maintain our most vulnerable citizens in Washington. This is how we believe you expect us to budget your tax dollars.



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